The Annual Essay on Public Morals.

Presented March 2nd 1840.

Among the various objects which engage the attention of this Society that of Public morals is certainly not the least important. Whatever may be the opinions of others as to the necessity or utility of good works, or the obligation of y^e^ Moral Law it forms no part of our religion to deny either; "for the grace of God that bringeth Salvation hath appeared to all men teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world." Tit II. 11, 12.

True morality is not different from holiness, which essentially consists in accordance with y^e^ will of God. Truth has for its object the will of God: and "this is the will of God even your Sanctification." All Societies therefore whose aim is the dissemination of truth, terminate upon the moral renovation of man as their object.

But a distinction is here necessary: In order to holiness or true Morality two things are required 1. The conformity of y^e^ external act to y^e^ law, & 2 the proper disposition of soul prompting the act. But altho' in Speculations on Morality this distinction is proper, yet for practical purposes it is often unavailable. Since we cannot judge the motives of men (which is y^e^ province of God alone) we are obliged to consider that moral

or immoral which possesses or fails in External conformity to the law. Public Morality is ye External Conformity of a Nation or Community as such to ye Laws of God the Commonly received rule of right and wrong. God deals with Nations or Societies in their public, as surely as with individuals in their personal Character: National integrity he rewards with National blessings and national sins he visits with public Calamities - The awards of any particular action correspond in their nature therewith. The Curse of Sin affects the Earthly happiness as well as ye Eternal interests of the transgressor; but whether it affect only one or both of these, depends upon the method of sins operation. If it select ye body as its instrument then the body may be involved in the Curse; but if the Criminality be confined to ye Soul so may also the curse.

Again Virtue and Vice are either public or private - open or concealed. In the former Class we can trace ye resemblance between their attendant awards bear to them in this respect. Dishonesty and injustice being public evils are attended with public disadvantages they forfeit the confidence and Esteem of ye Community. — Honesty and integrity by a Counter operation work out the opposite results; and so in Similar Cases.

The Subject of Public morals has important Spiritual bearings inasmuch as it may indirectly affect the Spiritual Standing of many individuals as will appear from various Considerations

1 When God is publickly acknowledged and his laws respected by a nation as such, he often may reward such obedience by Spiritual blessings by which individuals are regenerated and redeemed — And on the other hand where He is publicly dishon^d. and renounced by is there not reason to fear that He will in Vengeance remove his word and ordinances and thus ruin thousands who by ye influence of the truth might have been sanctified & saved? "Behold the days come Saith the Lord God that I will send a Famine in the land - not a famine for bread nor a thirst for water but of hearing ye words of the Lord." Amos 8.11.

2. Even if Gospel ordinances are continued among a people who mock at religion and trample upon Every thing Sacred, such a Society is very far from adapted to receive ye proper impression of ye truth - and uncongenial to the growth of piety - The State of a Community will also have a bearing upon the State of Christianity within it. While the Christian is in the world he is within ye pale of its influence, & temptation - Now when vice in its Seductive forms is Every where around him is it marvellous that his Corrupt nature should sometimes get the advantage and his better principles be surprized and overpowered? —

But the most striking aspect which the present subject presents to the mind is by its influence upon the temporal destiny of the Community.

I. It preserves their freedom: And of this there are none more jealous than ourselves, altho' it is common boon: yet the dearest of natures gifts. But although the birthright of Every man, it often sold away: We rejoice in our freedom from the idea of tyranny and oppression. But the only Security for its our freedoms preservation is in the favour of God; and the only means of securing it the public recognition of our obligation to Him.
Besides the obvious consideration that Sin itself is an oppressive despot and all our boast of freedom but a mockery, while we are ourselves the servants of Corruption — it is also true that ye most infallible protection whether from the tyranny of him who by law wields the power of ye people - or from the more dangerous tyranny of the Mobocracy of the land, whom we have seen too often in the name of "the people" exercising their inherent rights — is a correct tone of moral Sentiment in the Community. Vice tends to foster misrule & oppression: the more depraved a nation becomes, the more fitted are they to be the dupes of designing men - and the more disposed others become to rise to power at their Expense.

2. It will preserve their individual rights: Justice may be (refused

refused by the Magistrate and the cry of ye fatherless and the widow may enter into ye Ears of the Lord of Sabbaoth while Liberty is not only acknowledged but applauded in the land. And in addition to the public denial of Justice how greatly may it suffer from private hands! How much violence to ~~private~~ individual rights & in the common transactions between man & man?

Now the question is how shall these Evils be remedied or avoided? We need not search long for an answer: the prevalence of moral principle in ye community will most certainly and Effectually counteract ye Evil: to attempt any other remedy is foolish.

3. We may add that it will most Effectually Secure their happiness. This may be called ye great desideratum of human life - and in a subordinate sense a final End of our being. Now as God is ye fountain of all happiness we cannot rationally Expect enjoyment in a state of Separation from Him. We know moreover that he has made it a law of his moral Empire that happiness & misery should be the universal concomitants & consequences of virtue and vice respectively; so that it is true (at least as a general fact) that public virtue is ye most Solid & permanent basis of public happiness.

Having now ~~spoken~~ treated of the importance of the Subject in some manner, your attention is called to a point, of more special interest perhaps, to y present audience - namely

II. The influence of Ministerial Character upon y Public Morals:

This may be estimated,

(1.) from his Simple profession of the Christian religion.

"Ye are the salt of the Earth" said the Savior to his Early disciples which it was designed to be Equally true of his disciples in Every Succeeding age. The Church of God is the great ~~preser~~ "Conservative principle" of our World - the great barrier to the Spread of moral Corruption and putrefaction. This is admitted in some degree by adversaries and abundantly Confirmed by facts.

The Enemy of the Gospel admits the Christian to be y Standard of Morals, Even in his most faultfinding mood:

"He is no better than other men" is y daily reproach of an inexemplary professor. ~~Of~~ Course ~~if~~ he ~~is~~ no worse than others now this which to another would be considered a good Character is utterly a fault in the Christian. But how can this be unless a higher Standard of morality be set up, & more Expected in the one case than in the other?

Why blame him for the common delinquencies (failings) of men if he be not expected to live above them?

Is there not in this a tacit acknowledgt. that a true disciple of Christ would be better than other men? And this we find to be the common sentiment of the world. They look up to the Christian as their moral Exemplar, and congratulate themselves if they approximate merely, to the most inconsistent. The morality of the Christian Code needs no defence; its rigidness is frequently the subject of complaint, its laxity – never. Many of its opposers proclaim it worthy of the all praise, and yet with singular inconsistency neither yield themselves nor advise others to yield to its wholesome –

Others give it the same character substantially – not formally indeed for instead of applause they exhibit it to the censure of the world – for its over scrupulosity and austerity.

The influence of the Christian in preserving the world from moral corruption is no less confirmed by facts than acknowledged by adversaries – To adduce some of the most prominent:–

– In what part of the world do you find Immorality in its multiform appearances most prevailing? Notoriously in yt heathen world not in Christendom! It would be a work of supererogation to prove this: it is universally acknowledged. The man who would attempt to prove pagan morality as superior or equal to that of Christianized lands, would be considered as offering an insult to y Common Sense of men.

8.)

We might more rationally account for the difference by assuming that they were a <u>different race of beings</u>.
But what makes the difference? <u>The Gospel</u>. How does that appear? <u>From Experiment</u>: Nations which have been sunk in the ~~same~~ depths of vice, have been raised under its influence to the same distinction with Christian Nations.

As a <u>professor</u> then, of this religion the influence of the minister must be great - his Example is the rule of life to many who cannot separate his religion from the man professing it & make the one responsible for the Conduct of ye other: his Example may be the occasion of the rise or fall of many a Soul.

2. But his influence is not fully weighed unless in view of his <u>official character</u>:
"Like people like priest" is so often found to be ye fact ~~as~~ that it is now a received maxim accordant with Experience & the fitness of things - It is nothing but reasonable that the leader of any Sect should set an Example worthy of imitation both in zeal for the promulgation of its principles & the maintainance of its order.
What would Soc^{ty} select for such an Office as man whose attachm^{t} to their principle was lukewarm, whose Conduct was as often in violation of their order as in Conformity therewith? None surely who had any just conception of their true interests!
There are many things which render the influence of a Minister

vastly Superior to that of other leaders: 1. He derives his power and <u>Ministerial authority from God himself</u>; while others derive theirs from ye people and acknowledge themselves the peoples Servants Even in the Exercise of their authority. But he acknowledges no such source of power: He has received his Commission from the Head of the Church and is responsible to him alone for ye use or abuse of it. The people cannot instruct him how to act, nor Expect him to aim at pleasing them - On the Contrary so far as he keeps within his Commission he is Entitled not only to give instruction but to demand obedience. He is ye Ambassador of Heaven the plenipotentiary and Vicar of Jesus Christ - divinely appointed to this very thing -

2. Of course he enforces his instructions with tremendous <u>Sanctions</u>: His message so far as faithfully delivered finds a lodgement, meets a response in Every bosom - and binds ye Conscience of Every man - And with what Sanctions does he urge his pleas? The glories of Eternal happiness - the awfulness of Eternal woes! What little Analagy to the felicities or infelicities of ye present life, which are nevertheless sufficient to Excite the Energies of men!

Now what must be the influence of such an Office upon the mass of mankind - Especially where its Sanctity is admitted & respected?

How deadly and destructive an Engine when wielded in ye Cause of Error - of immorality? When the Servant of God not only turns aside from the path of duty - but uses the Sanctity of his office to give Currency to ungodliness - the vestments of ye Priest

of God

to sacrifice upon the altars of Baal or Ashtereth - and "borrow
y liverys of Heaven to serve the devil with!" - Vice is thus
kept in countenance = for the too superstitious people who
make the minister their Conscience keeper, persuade them-
selves there can be no harm in pursuing a Course sanctioned
by a man of God - Thus the silly Ephraimite, who obtained
a mercenary levite to superintend his idolatrous worship
exclaimed in the joy of his heart "Now I know that the
Lord will do me good, seeing I have a levite to my priest".
The peculiar construction of American Society, gives a public man
peculiar advantages - Where Every thing is in the hands of the people
who have neither y^e^ disposition nor ability to mark y^e^ tendency of
things a man of plausible address may lead whole Communities
into y^e^ Extremes of fanaticism & immorality: Especially when to
the influence of a public man he adds the authority of a minister of
religion - Upon this subject the ideas of men are more Crude &
indigested than upon almost Every other, & may while in their
naturally plastic state be moulded into any shape - and should
he at y^e^ Suggestion of Satan engage his Efforts on the side
of Error he may as Satan in his fall "drew the third part of
y^e^ Stars of heaven and cast them to the Earth" involve with
himself the perdition of thousands -

But how does the history of the Church bear out these assertions
as to Clerical influence on the Public morals? The testimony
very decisive in our favour as you all are aware. We will not
drag you thro' Each successive Century of the Church's history

but ask your attention to the age of the Reformation: Look at the immense revolution in the face of Society affected by the labours of the Reformers. What ~~ever~~ overthrow of Empire Ever accomplished Such a change in the moral aspect of affairs? What could Compete with the influence of Luther within the bounds of the German Confederation? What Earthly potentate wielded an authority over the minds and Consciences of men more Extensive than that of Calvin? It was not bounded by Geographical lines - Excluded by national prejudices or peculiarities: ~~nor~~ affected by difference of language Customs or laws: nay its influence is injured by y^e^ Lapse of years - for we glory to acknowledge ourselves Calvinists. Now we do not Contend that Every minister has so much influence: this must be graduated by his Energy Talents & weight of Character; but that he must have Some influence (more or less) is an incontrovertable fact. That a people should be moral while their pastor is immoral w^d^ Certainly be a phenomenon. That the host of the Lord Should march boldly to attack y^e^ formidable ramparts of ungodliness while their leaders hold back thro' fear or Secret Collusion with the adversary cannot in the nature of things occur. The defection of a leader in the Sacramental host of Gods Elect is a calamity of no small importance to our Zion - yields a Signal triumph to her foes - and gives all hell a Jubilee!

A brief reference to Some of the most prominent Evils of the day or review of the moral Condition of our land may be proper. "This day is" (in many respects) a day of trouble and of rebuke & of blasphemy: Error is not ashamed to appear openly at noonday.

Mistakes on theoretical points lay the foundation for deep practical Errors. For he who says it is no difference what a man believes, will easily be led to affirm that it no matter what a man does: will not his action correspond to his belief?

Many parts of our Soyel land (so called), have never heard of the Gospel according to the testimony of competent witnesses: and as we trace the morality of our Country to the prevalence of Evangel-ical principles it must necessarily be very low in such places.

In certain parts of our land there ~~appear~~ prevail an awful disregard of human life: it seems as if the ~~horrid &~~ unnatural Crime of murder were divesting itself by a frequent Exhibition of its most shocking and appealing features. The safer method of assination is superceding the decent forms of duelling. The law is powerless: Justices Connives at the offence - its Enormity is palliated ~~under~~ in the Public Press by the softened term - "unfortunate rencontre": and he who w? receive a favour if allowed like Cain to wear out a wretched Existence as a fugitive and a vagabond - Cursed of God and det-=Ested of men is received with open arms by y? Community & perhaps applauded for his 'Spirit'!

In every part of our land we behold a prevailing Violation of the Sabbath ~~in~~ under Every possible Shape & form, and in Every Society however moral; by legislative bodies such as the National House of representatives, by rail road & Steamboat and Stage Companies and as well as by individuals. Proof is unnecess? it has met the personal observation of Every man. —

The too general prevalence of fraudulent dealing, is another grievous Evil. The passion for becoming rich is now so ~~prevalent~~ strong as to lead to an utter disregard of means provided the End be attained. To cite particular cases is impossible. Speculation is a general distemper throughout our Country, as all the world knows, and it is too near akin to fraudulency to be a light matter. Now Since we know that the love of money is y^e root of all Evil, have we not abundant reason to fear as the unhappy result of such a state of ~~things~~ affairs the utter prostration of Every thing Sacred in the Community. I submit to your judgement whether Philosophy and History will not warrant the assertion that y^e accumulation of wealth on y^e part of its members is not only dangerous to, but inevitably subversive of, both y^e freedom and Morality of a nation — whether a proud Aristocracy can long Co-exist with liberty and religion?

The Evils of Intemperance are still a tax upon y^e health & wealth too, of our citizens. And it is rather mortifying to Say that we are rather retrograding than advancing in this matter. Some of our Legislatures seeing y^e evils of the traffic in ~~Ardent~~ liquors undertook to correct them in some measure by wholesome restraints. What they did was indeed no marvellous affair, but we regret to say that (whether prompted by appetite or interest or both,) they have been induced to retract: Even that and we now find that our felicitations on this Subject were Entirely premature & unseasonable.

We are happy to think that y^e Subject of Moral Reform, which contemplates the removal of an Evil great & disastrous in its

(Consequences

both as to individuals and the moral character of a nation has fallen into better hands than in former times. The means resorted to for its amelioration are less offensive to ye moral sense of the Community; and we hope that a disease which derived its greatest aggravations from ye unhappy method of its treatment, will hereafter ~~under~~ in more skilful hands be much abated.

The Licentiousness of ye Public Press, is an Evil of portentous aspect to the cause of religion and morals in this Community - We justly consider the invention of Printing an Epoch in the World's History - because one of the most useful arts ever discovered by man. We acknowledge the influence of ye Press: it is an Engine of tremendous power. We vote for its freedom - as we would for personal freedom. But personal liberty may be made a Cloak for maliciousness - and the liberty of the Press degenerate into licentiousness - and then it must be either restrained or constrained.

- We do not understand (as some do) by "the liberty of the Press" the right to publish mischievous Error, propagate falsehood, countenance vice, preach Sedition, recommend Murder, applaud Immorality, attack personal character, ruin private reputation, wound private feeling; become the Vehicle of private vengeance - the instrument of party malice, the Executioner of personal resentment - the retailer of Slander and defamation - the Common Carrier of ye Scandals Calumnies & vituperations - the Common Sewer of all the ribaldry and profanity, filth and abomination of the Land - ~~the~~ to Subvert ~~the~~ ye basis of all morality and uproot ye very foundations of Social and Civil Society.

While its conductors assume y^e^ dignity & exercise the decorum of their offices, they deserve the respect and approb^n^ of y^e^ Community, but when the Case is reversed - and they Enter into a league with Satan, for y^e^ defence of diabolical principles - and make their press a vehicle for y^e^ malice of hell - when they become y^e^ bosom friends of the vile & abandoned, 'hail-fellow-well met' with y^e^ profligate & licentious - the public patrons & chief-Supporters of y^e^ theatre, the race-Course, the Cockpit, the brothel and Every other sink of infamy & pollution - the assassins of Virtue - the Sworn Enemies of all righteousness - When from the Covert of zeal for y^e^ public good they discharge the Envenomed Shaft, at those whose greatness they Envy - whose goodness they cannot imitate - and Stab the dearest interests of y^e^ Community in the person of its most illustrious Citizens -

— Then I ask what Else can they merit than treatment as <u>public nuisances</u> and disturbers of y^e^ <u>Public peace</u> ? Better that we shd have <u>no press</u> - than that our land ~~shd~~ be ^a^flood~~ed~~ ~~with~~ of infidel & immoral publications shd be driven into a revolution like that of France - a bloody banquet where these modern Robespierres and Marats might drink y^e^ slaughter and feast on human gore -

—— Is such a press to be the Palladium of our liberties - the refuge of our dearest interests - then we have an Enemy in the Camp - our Cause is <u>betrayed</u> - But we despair not for c^d^ they like Milton's Pandemonium

* * * * * "Could they break their way
" By force, and at their heels all hell should rise
" With blackest insurrection, to confound
" Heaven's purest light, yet their great Enemy,
" all incorruptible, would on his throne
" Sit unpolluted, and th' Ethereal mould
" Incapable of stain would soon Expel
" Her mischief, and purge off the baser fire
" Victorious." * * * * *

16.)

To conclude. In view of yt importance of yt subject - the immense influence of ministers' character and the numerous & impending dangers I might urge the propriety of and importance of Continual Circumspection in view of our peculiar Situation -

Surrounded with such a cloud of witnesses - "for we are made a spectacle to the world and to Angels and to men" - who would not be circumspect? But I would assume the right of a teacher: You can draw inferences from the subject as well as myself, and to you I commit yt task.

— "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on and are punished." —

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